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2ND DISTRICT, NORTH CAROLINA

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

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Dear Principal:

In the current economic downturn, more and more families are struggling to make ends meet. As you may know, North Carolina's unemployment rate is one of the highest in the country, and in the past year there has been a 22 percent increase in the number of families applying for nutritional assistance nationwide. However, National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation has only increased 3 percent. I am writing to encourage you to reach out to your students and their parents to ensure that all students who are eligible are receiving free or reduced lunches and breakfasts through the NSLP.

As the former superintendent of North Carolina's schools and the spouse of a child nutritionist, I know that a good, well-balanced meal is often the difference between success and failure for our most at-risk children. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has been one of our most effective tools in improving school attentiveness and performance for low-income students by providing healthy food to help students through their day.

Families who are newly experiencing economic stress may not be aware that they are eligible for the school lunch program, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has expressed concern that eligible students are not receiving food. It is especially important that children who come from families which are economically stressed receive additional sources of nutrition outside of the home.

I encourage you to use your parent-teacher organizations and other resources to get the message out to families who may be eligible for school lunch. Resources on school lunch eligibility are available through my website at <http://etheridge.house.gov>, and my office stands ready to provide any assistance to your school or to families who may need assistance with this or any other federal initiative.

Sincerely,

Bob Etheridge, Member of Congress